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ABSTRACT

The Extension Food and Nutrition Education program was set up by the University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service to assist low-income families in improving their diets. Carrying out the program on a one-to-one basis are 365 assistants who are taught the basics of nutrition by trained home economics extension agents. These assistants then go into the field and work with individual families providing knowledge, skills, and motivation to improve diets; assisting families with budgeting problems; disseminating information about institutional services and programs for the family; and helping families broaden the range of their homemaking skills. SPIFFY (Special Program in Food For Youth) groups that feed and teach children about nutrition are also available. (JB)

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tennessee's extension food and nutrition education program

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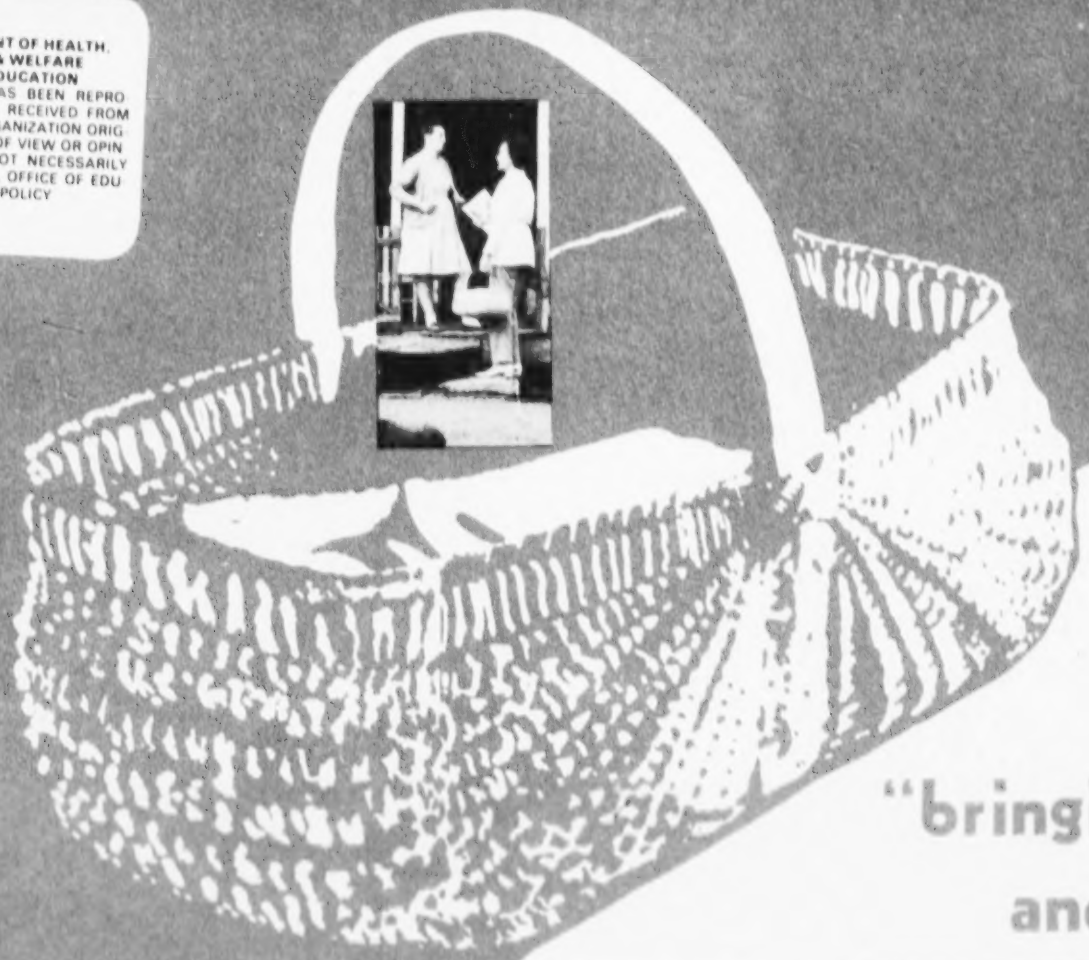

"bringing help and hope"

AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE / THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

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Counties shown in color on the map below are participating in a food and nutrition education program carried on by the University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service.

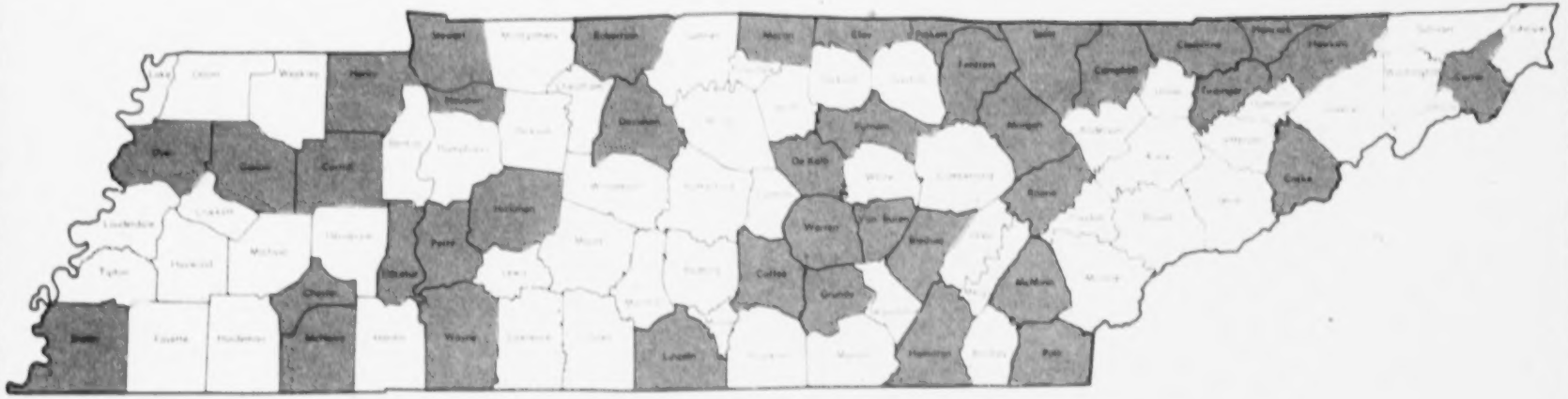
Objectives of the program are:

To assist low-income homemakers and youth to acquire knowledge, skills, and motivation which will improve the quality and adequacy of their diets.

To provide knowledge of public and private institutions, services, and programs which will aid the family.

To assist the families with budgeting problems.

To assist participants to develop a broader range of homemaking skills in addition to these associated with nutrition.



tennessee's extension food and nutrition education program

■ In its 500-mile westward stretch from the Great Smoky Mountains to the Mississippi River, Tennessee offers an abundance of beauty and opportunity. Fine farms with excellent beef, dairy and swine herds, and gracious homes can be found along nearly every highway.

But along with much wealth and gracious living, Tennessee has its share of poverty. Twenty-five percent of Tennessee's 1,233,000 households have an annual income of less than $3,000. An additional 16 percent have less than $5,000.

Low-income families who are poorly nourished and hungry are the concern of the *Extension Food and Nutrition Education Program* in Tennessee. This program began in 1969, after much concern was expressed for the problems of these families. An educational program was needed to help them improve their diets. The U.S. Department of Agriculture granted funds to every state, through the Extension Service, to initiate and support this work. Tennessee now has 40 counties taking part in this program.

The Extension Food and Nutrition Education Program is one of people talking to people—face to face, heart to heart.

The key people are the 346 program assistants who work with more than 15,000 families. They visit the disadvantaged homemaker and try to help her find ways to improve her family's diet.

"She seems to enjoy my visits but doesn't seem to remember to try what I suggest. People are slow to change, but I believe she will—in time."

Carrying the cane basket as their warm and friendly trademark, the program assistants work in the community where they live. They are interested and enthusiastic women who understand the people, their needs and problems. They reach and teach these people who need to know about food.

The program assistants are taught the basics of nutrition by trained home economics Extension agents. They are also trained in teaching methods and family living. Three weeks of concentrated training are given before they start their visits. Then weekly on-the-job training gives them additional support.

Training many times may mean trying the new methods of food preparation. The program assistants use donated foods furnished by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service for these practice periods. They also use them with their visits with the homemakers.

Learning about other agencies that give aid to families is also a part of the training. Representatives of cooperative agencies such as Welfare Services, OEO, Public Health Department, and Farmers' Home Administration often meet with the program assistants. They explain the services their organization has to offer to the low-income families. Program assistants are then able to refer families to these agencies for additional assistance.

Program assistants encourage their homemakers to pick and use wild greens that may be growing nearby. Dandelion greens, polk, field cress, and watercress are rich in vitamins A and C, nutrients often found lacking in the diets of these people.

In some counties where the Extension staff has limited room for the training meeting, local groups such as the Farm Bureau, rural electric cooperatives, county farmers' cooperatives, churches and housing projects offer their facilities.

The program assistants start working with the homemakers "where they are." Because of their own experiences, they understand many of the problems of these homemakers.

"On my first visit with the Jones family, I found water was a big problem," reported a program assistant in a training meeting. "They have a well in the yard but it needs cleaning. The children are helping to haul the water, with their wagon, from the neighbor's house a quarter-mile down the road."

First visits are get-acquainted visits. As the homemaker shows an interest in the program and has need for it, the program assistant returns. At that time she asks what food the family has eaten in the past 24 hours. This is a food recall. Such information helps the program assistant plan the lessons for her following visits.

Sometimes the program assistant makes several visits before she gains the homemaker's confidence and an invitation into her kitchen. The homemakers are learning that when someone knocks on the door, it's not always a bill collector or someone to take something away from them.

These basic nutrition lessons include what to eat, how much for each family member, how to buy food, and menu planning. The lessons

Good nutrition depends on wise planning. A trained program assistant reviews the basic four food groups to help this homemaker understand why her family needs green vegetables in their diet.

are taught in a number of ways, but a person-to-person demonstration gets the best results. Quite often the homemaker invites a relative or friend in to listen.

"One of my homemaker's mother, who lives in an adjoining county, makes it a point to visit her daughter every time I make a visit," reports a program assistant. "The first time she was there she asked if I 'teach people to cook?' Her daughter spoke up quickly, saying, 'She helps us more to save our money than just how to cook.' "

Basic techniques of food preparation are taught, using the facilities and equipment found in each home. Sometimes, though, a lesson on cleanliness, sanitation, and good housekeeping has to come ahead of lessons on food preparation.

"For my families who live in houses without screens, I show them that boiling vinegar and water will keep the flies away while we cook and talk about nutrition," explains a program assistant in a Middle Tennessee county.

Tennessee Extension agents are bringing about changes among low-income and disadvantaged families who have nutritional problems.

The food recalls show small but consistent improvements in food their families are eating.

Other changes have taken place, too. Homes are cleaner and more sanitary. Yards are neater and buildings in better repair. Many families now have gardens. Some families have better housing—through FHA loans or by moving to housing projects. Others are accepting and using commodity foods now that they have learned how to prepare them. Families have learned the where's and how's of getting food stamps and how to use them wisely.

"The XXX family has cleaned up their house," wrote one program assistant in her report. Records of progress are kept on all families. "The walls have paneling now instead of cardboard. They have curtains on the windows and a new linoleum on the floor. The unpleasant odors are almost gone.

"It seems the family members have an optimistic outlook for the future. They are having juices and fresh fruit for snacks instead of the usual candy bars and 'dopes.' They bought a freezer and canned more fruits and vegetables this year than ever before. She tries to make every meal tasty and nutritious."

"I try to help her plan her family's diet for survival, economy and nutrition. She had never really figured out what she spent on groceries."

There are malnourished youth at every socio-economic level, but youth from low-income families are much more likely to be poorly fed or hungry.

These boys and girls are no different from other young people. They have the same basic physical, biological, and social needs that must be met in order for them to become responsible citizens.

Program assistants have found some of the pre-school children in the homes they visit never have any milk to drink because there is no refrigerator for keeping the milk. This calls for a lesson on the use of powdered milk.

The nutrition and food related program for youth began in 1970, one year after the work with adults started. The program is called SPIFFY, meaning *S*pecial *P*rogram *I*n *F*ood *F*or *Y*outh.

Small neighborhood SPIFFY groups of 5 to 15 members are formed primarily in urban areas. Fifty-four percent of the youth population live there, but only 10 percent are being reached through other Extension organizations.

More than 11,000 boys and girls ranging in age from 8-19 are SPIFFY members. Many older teen-age low-income youth serve as junior leaders. There are more than 800 youth and adult leaders who are volunteering to help with this work.

Cheerful, happy, and elated was a 17-year-old boy who had his first birthday party. It was at a SPIFFY meeting. Though it was special for him, it had built-in nutrition education for all the members. Because he had been their leader, the other boys and girls made him a

cake. And, the adult leader found this an opportune time to teach some basic cooking principles.

Extension agents and program assistants train volunteers and also work directly with SPIFFY members. Many program assistants often teach children while they visit with the homemakers.

As the program assistant approached a house with no electricity, a young boy, undersized for his age, ran to greet her. "You know the recipe for a cobbler pie you told Mama to try? Well, she did it and it sure was good! And those apples are good for us too, right?"

The educational experiences are stimulating and informal. Food buying is often taught in the grocery store, and gardening right in a garden. Urban youth learn about the milking process and use of milk products in visits to farms. They see how food is processed commercially in trips to processing plants.

Games and songs about nutrition, role playing, group discussion, and demonstrations all

(above) Children find it hard to concentrate on school work when they're hungry.

(left) "Our SPIFFY club meets after school and sometimes I can hardly wait for the bell to ring. Our teen-leader always has something new for us to do. She shows us things to cook that I can do at home."

"At our SPIFFY meeting we learned to use dry milk and disguise it with flavoring for a nutritious snack. We can get twice as much for our money and it's better for us than those sugary fruit drinks that just make us fat."

involve SPIFFY members in new experiences to help them develop positive attitudes of personal development.

"Billie had never eaten liver before attending the SPIFFY meeting. Those are the best hours he ever spent," a mother was heard to say. "He's drinkin' a lot more milk and eatin' more vegetables now than he used to. Our whole family's eatin' food we didn't think we liked since he has been goin' to those meetings."

SPIFFY members go to day camps. They have fun, lots of good food and learn how food makes them grow and have energy for fun.

Several local health departments are enthusiastic cooperators by taking blood samples of SPIFFY members and analyzing them for the iron content. In 1970, the hematocrit readings showed that 36 percent of members tested had levels of iron below normal. Some were so low that they needed immediate treatment by a physician. Others were helped by including more iron-rich foods in their diets.

From the beginning, the Agricultural Extension Service has built evaluation methods into its program to find out what changes in food habits this program could bring about.

Food recalls, as mentioned earlier, are records of what the family has had to eat in the past 24 hours. Taken every six months, they form the basis for evaluating food habit changes.

MILK

Percentage having adequate servings

	ADULTS	YOUTH
March 1969	35%	20%
September 1971	51%	34%

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Percentage having adequate servings

	ADULTS	YOUTH
March 1969	23%	24%
September 1971	53%	34%

Significant changes have come about.

The program assistants, centering their teaching around the four food groups (meats, fruits and vegetables, milk, and breads and cereals), place emphasis on the most critical needs. Food recalls showed that these families were lacking most in the milk, fruits and vegetable groups.

Now, fewer are consuming "empty calories."

One family who was drinking cola drinks three times a day is now drinking non-fat dry milk. The homemaker has learned how to make buttermilk and cottage cheese from the dry milk and is now using it in cooking.

"I really can tell a difference in the groceries being bought by some of my customers since the program assistant has been coming 'round. They don't buy as much junk now," said a grocery man in a small country store in East Tennessee.

There have been other changes, too. Homemakers have more confidence in themselves. "She has developed from a shy, timid person whose husband thought she could do nothing, to a wife who is appreciated for her many homemaking talents," reports a program assistant.

Gradually, after many visits and when the homemaker shows definite progress, she graduates from the personal visits of the program assistant. She is invited to become a part of a nutrition group made up of other homemakers like herself. These groups, organized by the program assistant, meet in the homemaker's own neighborhood or community. Monthly, the Extension office mails to these homemakers a nutrition newsletter that reinforces what the program assistant teaches.

Homemakers who attend the nutrition group meetings feel more a part of the community. Many times there is newfound pride in the neighborhood. And, what they learn about food they are passing on to their friends.

How do the program assistants feel about their job? "I believe I can help teach anybody now." "I value the friendship of these families; they're my neighbors." "I would not take anything for the experience of working with this program. I should pay U-T for what I have learned and

for being able to work for them."

How do the Extension agents feel about the program? "We're doing more than just teaching nutrition; we're helping homemakers help themselves, to make their own decisions and not to wait for others to do it for them."

"Our records show that the program assistants are making progress. It's certainly a program that's helping the people who need the help, working with them in a way that they can learn to help themselves. It has changed their thinking about more things than just food."

To look up and not down
To look forward and not back,
To look out and not in, and
To lend a hand . . .

BEFORE

AFTER

Program assistants have training in teaching methods, nutrition and family living. Local agencies cooperate by offering their facilities for meeting and in some cases provide materials.

"We get our water from our neighbor down the road. I usually just make two trips a day."

SP 182 **JUNE 1972**

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS

The University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating in furtherance of Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914.

Agricultural Extension Service
V. W. Darter, Dean